

fact sheet



Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act

Issue: Fisheries Ecosystems

Overview: For several years, fisheries scientists and managers have advocated ecosystem approaches to fisheries management, whereby management programs consciously account for and address (1) all living resources within a specific marine area/ecosystem, including stocks targeted by fishing operations, non-target stocks, and the marine environment; and (2) all sources of environmental stress and factors influencing the ecosystem, including fishing operations. An ecosystem approach to fisheries management is adaptive and regionally directed. It takes account of ecosystem knowledge and uncertainty, and identifies where we need to improve our data. It considers the various external influences on the ecosystem and strives to balance diverse societal objectives. NOAA and the Councils have already begun integrating this approach to fisheries management, but more can be done. The Administration has committed through its Ocean Action Plan to make resource management decisions based on ecosystem considerations. The immediate question is how best to modify current fishery management practices to further incorporate ecosystem management principles.

Proposal: The Administration's Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) bill includes provisions to help redirect fishery management policies and procedures away from the traditional emphasis on single target species, and toward a broader ecosystem-based approach:

- (1) The bill amends the Act's statement of findings, purposes, and policy by affirming the importance of ecosystems and ecosystem-related objectives.
- (2) The term "ecosystem" is defined as "a geographically specified system of living marine resources, the people, the environment, and the processes that control its dynamics."
- (3) The bill authorizes the Councils to take ecosystem considerations into account when developing fishery management plans and plan amendments.
- (4) The Secretary of Commerce, working with the Councils, is directed to develop advisory guidelines for the Councils on incorporating ecosystem considerations in the fishery management process.
- (5) The Councils are authorized, but not mandated, to prepare "fishery ecosystem plans."

Purpose: The major purpose of the fisheries ecosystems provisions in the Administration's MSA bill is to provide the Councils with broad policy guidance and clear authorization to

address fisheries management from an ecosystem approach. Since the Councils have currently addressed ecosystem management to varying extents and in different ways, these MSA provisions will allow them to tailor approaches to address the specific needs of their regions. Additionally, this MSA proposal emphasizes the Councils' discretionary authority rather than mandating actions that, in some instances, may not be necessary or may exceed the current capabilities of ecosystem science.